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Lone-parent families in Canada





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1994 International Year of the Family  
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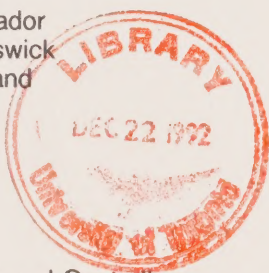
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# Lone-parent families in Canada

Target groups project

**Colin Lindsay**

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## 1994 International Year of the Family

The objectives of the International Year of the Family are to "highlight the importance of families; increase a better understanding of their functions and problems; . . . and focus attention upon the rights and responsibilities of all family members".

United Nations

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# HIGHLIGHTS

- In 1991, there were almost one million lone-parent families in Canada, a 34% increase from 1981. In comparison, the number of two-parent families with children rose just 6% over the same period. As a result, lone parents accounted for 20% of all families with children in 1991, up from 17% in 1981.
- The vast majority of lone parents in Canada are women. In 1991, they represented 82% of all lone parents.
- Quebec had the highest incidence of lone-parenthood in 1991, with 22% of families in this province headed by a single parent. Among the other provinces, lone-parent families accounted for about one of every five families with children. The exception was Newfoundland, where just 16% of families with children had only one parent.
- In 1991, 17% of Canadian children lived in a lone-parent family.
- Over half of lone parents are either divorced or separated. At the same time, an increasing number are single never-married people. In 1991, one in five women and about one in ten men parenting alone were never-married singles. Both of these figures have roughly doubled since 1981.
- Female lone parents are considerably less likely than other parents to be employed. As well, the share of these women working outside the home was actually lower in 1991 (52%) than in 1981 (54%).
- There were sharp drops in the employment levels of lone-parent women during the recessions in 1981-1983 and the early 1990s.
- Unemployment rates are very high among lone parents. In 1991, 16.8% of female and 15.7% of male lone parents were unemployed, compared to just 9.6% of women and 7.7% of men in two-parent families with children.
- Lone parents generally have lower levels of formal education than other parents. In 1991, only 8% of women and 13% of men parenting alone had a university degree, versus 12% for mothers and 17% for fathers in dual-parent households.
- Lone-parent families have very low incomes compared to dual-parent units. In 1990, the average income of female-headed lone-parent families, at \$22,000, was just 38% that of two-parent families with children (\$57,200).
- The proportion of lone-parent families headed by women with incomes below Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-offs, 61% in 1990, is one of the highest of any group in the country.
- As well, there has been no improvement in the income situation of lone-parent families during the 1980s. In fact, the average income of these families in real terms was \$600 lower in 1990 than in 1980, while the percentage classified as having low incomes in 1990 was actually three percentage points higher than the 1980 level.
- Transfer payments accounted for 30% of the 1990 income of families headed by lone mothers, compared with 13% for male-headed lone-parent families and 7% for two-parent families with children. For female lone parents with incomes below \$20,000, close to 70% of total income was received in the form of transfer payments.
- Lone-parent families are generally less likely than other families to own their homes. For instance, in 1991, only about one in three female-headed lone-parent families owned their home (30%), while nearly four of five two-parent families with children were home-owners (79%).
- As a result of low income levels, families with just one parent allocate less money to most major spending categories than do two-parent units, both in terms of actual dollars and dollars per person. Consequently, a smaller proportion of these families have various household amenities, such as washing machines, freezers, video cassette recorders and home computers.
- Fewer single-parent than dual-parent families own a vehicle. In 1991, 59% of female-headed lone-parent families had at least one vehicle, versus 95% of two-parent families with children.





# INTRODUCTION

The structure of family living in Canada is changing. In the past several decades there have been significant increases in common-law unions, the incidence of divorce and remarriage, and the number of blended families. As well, there has been substantial growth in the number of people living alone. One of the most dramatic of these changes has been the rising number of lone-parent families.

Nearly one of every five families with children in Canada is headed by a lone parent, the vast majority of whom are women. This is a concern because so many of these families are economically disadvantaged. For example, over 60% of lone-parent families headed by women under age 65 currently have incomes below Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-offs.

These and other characteristics of lone-parent families in Canada are described in this report. The information has been integrated from a variety of Statistics Canada sources to provide an overview of the demographic and family status, employment, income, housing, and activity patterns of lone parents and their families.

This material will be of particular interest to agencies and individuals involved in analyzing, planning, developing and/or implementing the delivery of social services to Canadians. It will be of special interest to those concerned with issues related to family organization and low income, as well as those with a broad interest in the evolution of women's role and status.

Much of the information in this report has been taken directly from Statistics Canada publications. However, a number of series include previously unpublished data from sources such as the General Social Survey, the Survey of Consumer Finances, the Household Facilities and Equipment Survey, the Labour Force Survey, and the Survey of Family Expenditure.

Because the data in this report are drawn from different sources, the concepts and universes vary considerably. These surveys are conducted at different times during the year, over different time periods, with different sample sizes, and with different data collection techniques.

There are also differences between the surveys in the definitions, concepts, and universes as they apply to lone parents and their families. For example, while all lone-parent families have, by definition,

children living at home, the age(s) of the children included varies in the different surveys. As well, some surveys include several different age breakdowns for either lone parents and/or their children. For the purposes of this report, the one with the greatest applicability for analytic purposes has been used.

Those seeking more precise information on comparability and data quality should consult the list of publications at the end of the report or contact the author.

The data in this report focus primarily on lone-parent families headed by women. Whenever possible and relevant, comparable information on lone-parent families headed by men is included. However, because the number of such families is small, the sample size was often not large enough to provide reliable estimates for male lone parents or their families.

As well, most series describing lone parents and/or their families are accompanied by "benchmark" comparisons with women and men in two-parent families with children. It should be noted that these families include both married couples and those living common-law.

The information in this report is generally presented at the national level, although several provincial breakdowns are shown where applicable. As well, historical data have been used to illustrate significant trends.

This report was prepared under the direction of Gordon Priest, Director, and Rick Baxter, Assistant Director, of the Housing, Family and Social Statistics Division, Statistics Canada.

The data were collected and analyzed with the assistance of Catherine Bronson. The author also gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Lisa Verdon and Nancy Ghalam, as well as Anne Sabourin, Sonia Theriault, Jeannine Morissette, Catherine Allan, Judith Cotterill, Rosemary Bender, Peter Hewer, John Bradford, Penny Barclay, and Rémi Gélinas.

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# FAMILY AND POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

## Decade of growth

Growth in the number of lone-parent families has been one of the most dramatic changes in the structure of the Canadian family over the last several decades<sup>1</sup>. By 1991, there were almost one million (954,700) lone-parent families in Canada, an increase of 34% from 1981 (Table 1.1). In contrast, the number of two-parent families with children rose just 6% in the same period. As a result, lone-parent families represented 20% of all families with children in 1991, up from 17% in 1981 (Chart 1.1, Table 1.2).

The rate of growth in the number of lone-parent families, however, has slowed in the last several years. Their number rose 12% between 1986 and 1991, compared with 20% in the 1981-1986 period and 28% between 1976 and 1981.

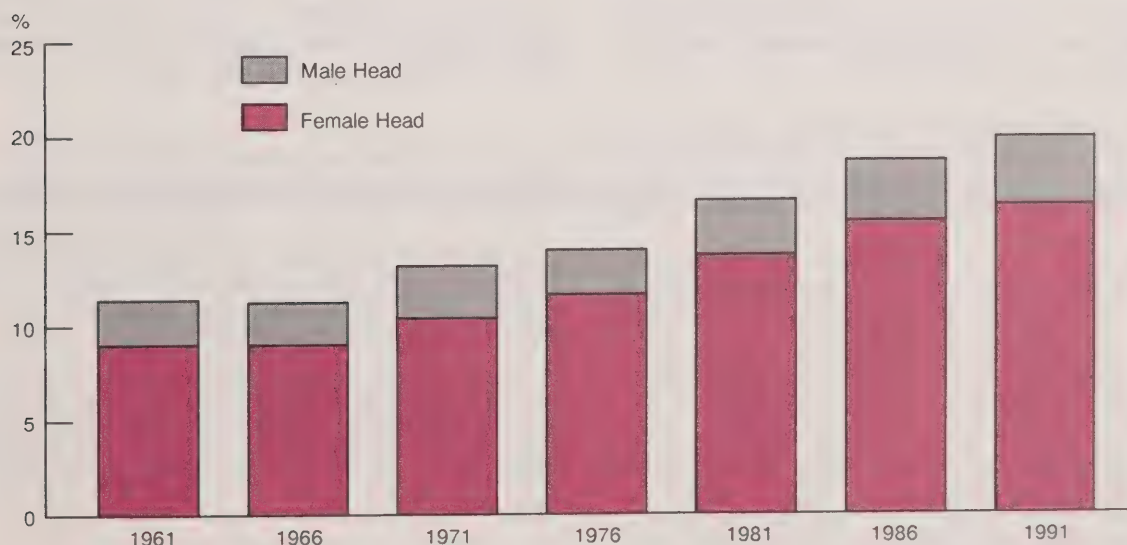
## Women majority of lone parents

Women make up the vast majority of lone parents in Canada. In 1991, 82% of all lone-parent families were headed by women. That year, they numbered 786,400, an increase of 33% from 1981 (Chart 1.2).

There has also been a large increase in the number of lone-parent families headed by men. Between 1981 and 1991, the number of these families rose 35%, from 124,200 to 168,200.

<sup>1</sup> In this section, families with children include lone-parent families and two-parent families (including both married and common-law couples) with never-married children of any age living at home.

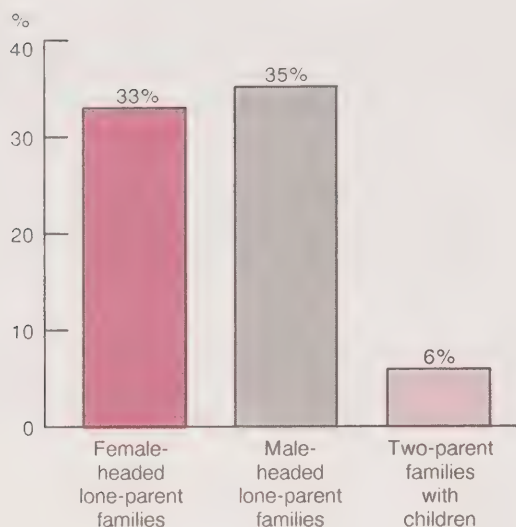
**Chart 1.1** Lone-parent families as a percentage of all families with children, 1961-1991



Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 93-312; and Census of Canada.

There was almost no change, however, in the distribution of lone parenthood between women and men in this period. By 1991, men headed just 17.6% of all lone-parent families, virtually the same figure as in 1981.

**Chart 1.2** Percentage growth of selected family types, 1981-1991



Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 93-312.

## Many children

Currently, 17% of Canadian children live with just one parent. In 1991, 1.5 million children lived in a lone-parent situation (Table 1.3).

Lone-parent families, though, tend to have fewer children than two-parent families. In 1991, there were an average of 1.6 children living at home per lone-parent family, compared with 1.9 in two-parent families with children.

As well, the children in lone-parent families tend to be somewhat older than those in husband-wife families. For example, in 1991, 44% of lone-parent families, compared with 33% of two-parent households, had at least one child aged 18 or over (Table 1.4). At the same time, fewer lone-parent families (22%) than two-parent units (36%) had at least one pre-school-age child.

Still, in 1991, there were over 200,000 lone-parent families with children under the age of 6, and over 600,000 with at least one child under the age of 18.

Not surprisingly, the vast majority of children in lone-parent families live with their mother. In 1991, 83% of lone-parent children lived in a female-headed lone-parent family.

As well, while women and men acting as lone parents have roughly the same number of children per family, female lone parents are more likely than their male counterparts to have young children. In 1991, 24% of female lone parents had at least one child under age 6, whereas the figure was only 13% among male lone parents.

## Most lone-parents aged 25-44

Lone parents are becoming increasingly concentrated in the 25-44 age range. For example, in 1991, 54% of all female lone parents were in this age category, up from 47% in 1981 (Table 1.5). Another 27% of female lone parents were aged 45-64, while 12% were 65 years or over, and 6% were aged 15-24. As well, the proportion of female lone parents in each of these last three categories declined between 1981 and 1991, especially in the 45-64 age range.

The largest number of male lone parents are also in the 25-44 age category, although the percentage of male lone parents in this range in 1991 (44%) was only slightly greater than that for men aged 45-64 (41%). This represents a change from 1981 when men aged 45-64 made up the largest share of male lone parents.

As well, young men make up a very small share of male lone parents. In 1991, just 1% of men parenting alone were aged 15-24. The remaining 14% of male lone parents were aged 65 or over.

## Most lone parents separated or divorced

The primary path to lone parenthood is marriage dissolution, although single never-married people raising children on their own make up a rapidly growing share of all lone parents.

The majority of both female and male lone parents are either divorced or separated. In 1991, 57% of these women and 71% of their male counterparts were in one of these two marital categories (Table 1.6).

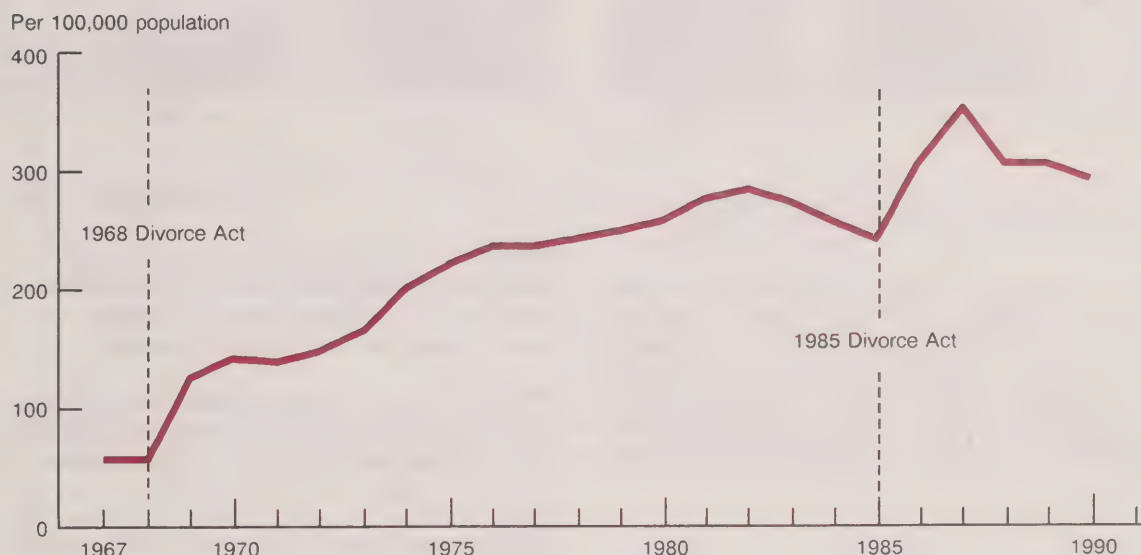


## The Divorce Act and lone parenthood

Changes to the Divorce Act have undoubtedly had an effect on the number and characteristics of lone parents. Prior to 1968, there were few divorces in Canada. However, the 1968 Divorce Act liberalized access to divorce by broadening the legal grounds on which it could be granted. As a result, the divorce rate increased more than five times between the late 1960s and the mid-1980s, rising from around 50 divorces per 100,000 population to over 250 (Chart 1.3).

Restrictions on divorce were further eased when a new Divorce Act was passed in 1985. Again, there was a large increase in the number of divorces granted following the introduction of the new legislation. However, much of this increase appears to have been accounted for by people who put off divorcing in 1984 and 1985 in anticipation of the revised legislation, and then initiated proceedings once the new law was enacted. Indeed, in 1988 and 1989, the divorce rate dropped back to its 1986 level (around 310 divorces per 100,000 population) and then fell a further 4% in 1990 to 294 divorces per 100,000 people.

**Chart 1.3** Divorces per 100,000 population, 1967-1990



Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogues 82-003S and 84-205.

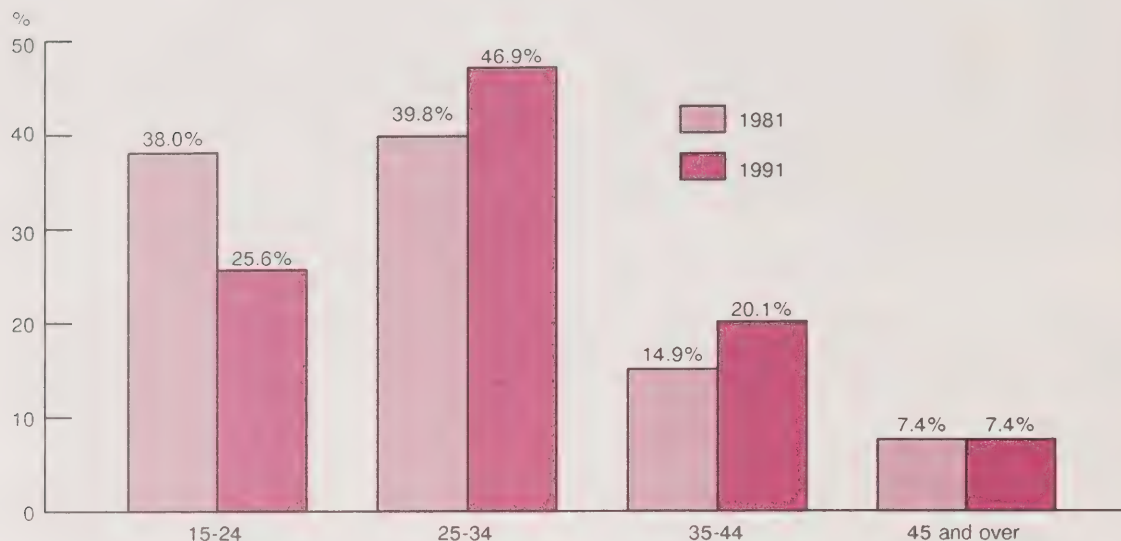
Different trends emerge, though, when these two marital categories are examined separately. Between 1981 and 1991, the percentage of divorced lone parents rose from 26% to around 33% for both women and men. In contrast, the proportion of female lone parents reporting they were separated fell from 29% in 1981 to 25% in 1991; among men the figure slipped from 40% to 38% in the same period.

In terms of lone parenthood, divorce has a much greater impact on women than men because courts have been far more likely to grant mothers custody of the children. In 1989, wives were granted sole custody of 74% of all children involved in divorces

whereas fathers received sole custody of just 13%. In another 12% of cases the parents were awarded joint custody.

## More single never-married lone parents

There has been a particularly sharp increase in the share of lone parents who are single never-married people. By 1991, one in five (20%) female lone parents and almost one in ten (8%) males fell in this category. Both figures have roughly doubled since 1981 when 11% of female lone parents and 4% of males were never-married singles.

**Chart 1.4** Age distribution of single never-married female lone-parents, 1981 and 1991

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogues 92-905 and 93-312.

The large majority of single never-married female lone parents are under age 35. In 1991, 47% of these women were aged 25-34 and 26% were aged 15-24 (Chart 1.4). Another 20% were aged 35-44, while only 7% were aged 45 or over. The figures for women aged 25-34 and 35-44 were both up from 1981, while that for women aged 15-24 was down substantially.

### Widowhood also important

The death of a spouse also accounts for a significant share of lone parenthood. In 1991, 21% of male and 23% of female lone parents were widowed. The share of lone parents produced by widowhood, however, has fallen sharply in the last several decades. In the 1950s and 1960s, for example, more than 60% of all lone parents were widows<sup>2</sup>.

### Not a life long experience

For most people, lone parenthood is a transitional, rather than permanent, stage of the life cycle. As some people become lone parents, many others leave this family cycle phase, either through

marriage or when their children leave home. At the same time, a small number of people will be lone parents more than once in their lifetime.

Unfortunately, there is little current information describing how periods of lone parenthood end or how long they last. The only comprehensive analysis of national data on this subject is from the 1984 Family History Survey<sup>3</sup>. Although somewhat dated, this information does offer several insights into these aspects of lone parenthood.

The 1984 study indicated that many women who had experienced periods of lone parenthood were no longer in this phase of the family cycle. In 1984, 64% of women who had ever parented alone were no longer lone parents (Table 1.7). At the same time, 12% of women who had ever been lone parents had experienced more than one episode.

Women who had entered lone parenthood as single never-married persons were the most likely to have ended lone-parenting spells. In 1984, 83% of these women who had ever been lone parents were no longer in this family stage. In contrast, only 57%

<sup>2</sup> Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 91-535.

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, Family History Survey, 1984. See also "Female lone parenting over the life course," by Maureen Moore in the *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 14(3), 1989.



of women who had become lone parents as a result of separation or divorce, and just 47% of those who had been widowed, were no longer lone parents.

For the vast majority of women, periods of lone parenthood end when they marry, either for the first time in the case of single never-married mothers, or through remarriage in the case of divorced or widowed women. Of women who were no longer lone parents in 1984, 84% had married. In the remaining 16% of cases, their children had left home.

Periods of lone parenthood averaged 5.5 years for all women who had experienced lone parenthood as of 1984<sup>4</sup>. Of these women, 32% had been lone parents for fewer than 2 years, 29% for 2-5 years, 22% for 5-10 years, and 17% for more than 10 years.

Widows tend to experience the longest periods of lone parenthood. On average, widows were lone parents for 7.5 years, compared with 5.6 years for separated/divorced women and 4.4 years for single never-married mothers.

## Provincial distribution

The incidence of lone parenthood is highest in Quebec, where 22% of all families had just one

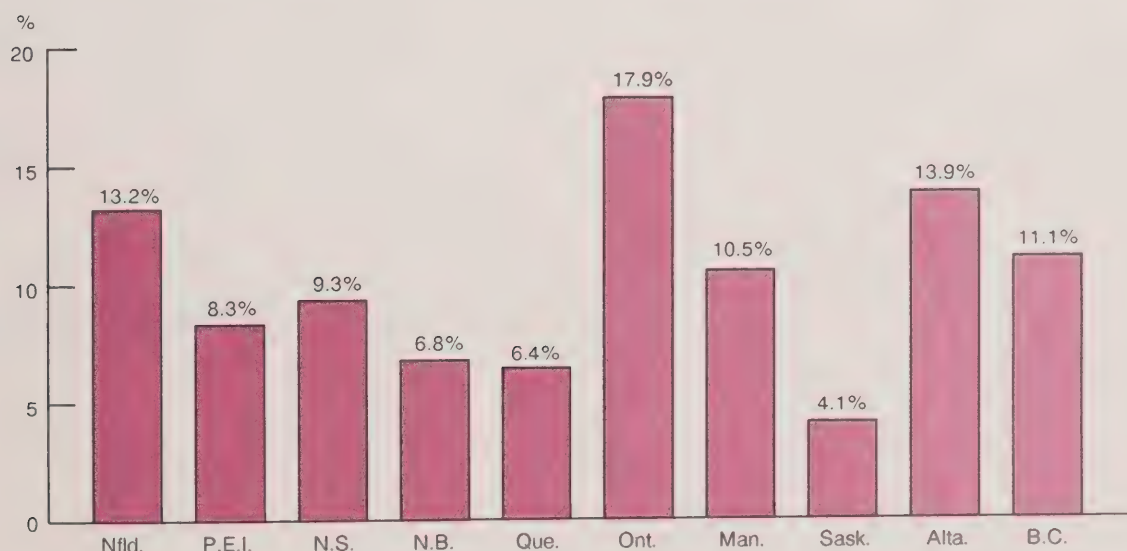
parent in 1991 (Table 1.8). Lone-parent families made up around 20% of all families with children in the other provinces, with the exception of Newfoundland, where just 16% of families with children had only one parent.

Ontario, as the province with the largest population, however, is home to the single largest concentration of lone-parent families. In 1991, 36% of all lone-parent families in Canada lived in Ontario. Quebec had the second largest share at 28%, followed by British Columbia (11%) and Alberta (9%). Overall, these four provinces were home to 84% of all lone-parent families, about the same figure as their share of the total Canadian population.

Ontario has also been characterized by the largest percentage increase in the number of lone-parent families in recent years. For example, the number of lone-parent families increased by 18% in Ontario between 1986 and 1991 (Chart 1.5). In contrast, the increase in the number of lone-parent families in the remaining provinces ranged from 14% in Alberta to just 4% in Saskatchewan in the same period.

<sup>4</sup> Includes those who were in a period of lone parenthood at the time of the survey.

**Chart 1.5** Percentage growth in the number of lone-parent families, by province, 1986-1991



Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 93-312.

Women make up the vast majority of lone parents in all provinces. In 1991, the proportion of lone parents who were women ranged from 81% in Newfoundland to 84% in Nova Scotia.

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## Many Aboriginal women lone parents

A relatively large proportion of Aboriginal women are lone parents. In 1986, 15% of all Aboriginal women aged 15 and over were lone parents, compared with 7% of non-Aboriginal women (Table 1.9).

Men with Aboriginal origins are also somewhat more likely than their non-Aboriginal counterparts to be lone parents. However, because of the large number of Aboriginal women parenting alone, men make up a relatively small proportion of all lone parents in the Aboriginal community. In 1986, just 15% of Aboriginal lone parents were men, while 85% were women.

---

## Mixed results among visible minorities

Women who report ethnic origins in one of the groups classified as a visible minority<sup>5</sup> are also somewhat over-represented among lone parents. In

1986, 9% of all visible minority women were lone parents, compared with 7% of other Canadian women.

The relatively high incidence of lone parenthood among visible minority women, however, was accounted for largely by women with Black ethnic origins, 18% of whom were lone parents in 1986. This compared with just 6% of other visible minority women. Overall, women with Black ethnic roots made up half (49%) of all female lone parents from a visible minority.

Women with Latin American or Southeast Asian origins were also somewhat more likely than other Canadians to be lone parents. On the other hand, the incidence of lone parenthood among women in the remaining visible minority groups was below that for Canada as a whole. As well, men made up a relatively large share of lone parents, often 20% or more, in a number of these groups.

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<sup>5</sup> *Visible minorities include people who reported their ethnic origins as Black, Chinese, Filipino, Indo-Pakistani, Japanese, Korean, Latin American, Pacific Islander, South East Asian, or West Asian/Arab. As well, the classification includes a small number of people who reported Aboriginal origins along with visible minority origins. These people were also counted in the section on Aboriginals.*



Table 1.1

## Families with children, 1961-1991

	Lone-parent families			Two-parent families with children	Total families with children
	Female head	Male head	Total		
			000s		
1961	272.2	75.2	347.4	2,693.9	3,041.3
1966	300.4	71.5	371.9	2,950.9	3,322.8
1971	378.1	100.7	478.7	3,146.2	3,624.9
1976	464.3	95.0	559.3	3,446.0	4,005.3
1981	589.8	124.2	714.0	3,598.4	4,312.4
1986	701.9	151.7	853.6	3,679.8	4,533.4
1991	786.4	168.2	954.7	3,821.6	4,776.3

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 93-312; and Census of Canada.

Table 1.2

## Lone-parent families as a % of all families with children, 1961-1991

	Lone-parent families		Total
	Female head	Male head	
		%	
1961	9.0	2.5	11.4
1966	9.0	2.2	11.2
1971	10.4	2.8	13.2
1976	11.6	2.4	14.0
1981	13.7	2.9	16.6
1986	15.5	3.3	18.8
1991	16.4	3.5	20.0

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 93-312; and Census of Canada.

Table 1.3

## Families, by number of children living at home, 1991

	Lone-parent families			Two-parent families with children
	Female head	Male head	Total	
	%			
Families with:				
One child	57.9	62.2	58.6	36.2
Two children	30.4	27.9	30.0	42.9
Three or more children	11.6	9.8	11.3	20.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total number of children (000s)</b>	<b>1,238.6</b>	<b>253.7</b>	<b>1,492.2</b>	<b>7,308.5</b>
% of all children	14.1	2.9	17.0	83.0
Average number of children per family	1.6	1.5	1.6	1.9

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 93-312.

Table 1.4

## Families, by age distribution of children, 1991

	Lone-parent families			Two-parent families
	Female head	Male head	Total	
	%			
All children under age 6	15.8	8.8	14.6	21.4
At least one child under age 6 with other children aged 6 or over	8.4	4.6	7.8	14.6
Total with children under age 6	24.3	13.4	22.4	36.0
All children aged 6-17	33.4	36.3	33.9	31.4
All children aged 18 or over	35.0	42.0	36.3	21.4
At least one child aged 18 or over with other children under age 18	7.3	8.3	7.5	11.2
Total with at least one child over age 18	42.4	50.3	43.8	32.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total number of families (000s)</b>	<b>786.4</b>	<b>168.2</b>	<b>954.7</b>	<b>3,821.6</b>

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 93-312.



Table 1.5

## Age distribution of lone parents, 1981 and 1991

	Female lone parents		Male lone parents	
	1981	1991	1981	1991
	%			
<b>Age</b>				
15-24	7.7	6.4	2.0	1.4
25-44	47.4	54.3	38.1	44.3
45-64	32.8	27.4	45.3	40.6
65 and over	12.1	11.7	14.6	13.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total number of lone parents (000s)</b>	<b>589.8</b>	<b>786.4</b>	<b>124.2</b>	<b>168.2</b>

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogues 92-905 and 93-312.

Table 1.6

## Marital status of lone parents, 1981 and 1991

	Female lone parents		Male lone parents	
	1981	1991	1981	1991
	%			
Single never-married	11.0	19.5	4.3	8.3
Separated	29.3	24.6	40.4	37.6
Divorced	26.4	32.5	25.7	33.6
Widowed	33.3	23.4	29.5	20.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total number of lone parents</b>	<b>589.8</b>	<b>786.4</b>	<b>124.2</b>	<b>168.2</b>

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogues 92-905 and 93-312.

Table 1.7

## Duration of lone-parent episodes, 1984

	Female lone parents			Total
	Separated/ divorced	Widowed	Single never- married	
	%			
<b>Duration of lone-parent episodes</b>				
Less than 2 years	24.6	25.0	46.6	31.9
2-5 years	35.0	19.4	24.9	29.0
5-10 years	23.2	27.4	17.4	22.0
More than 10 years	17.2	28.2	11.1	17.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total number of lone-parent episodes(000s)</b>	<b>697</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>460</b>	<b>1,396</b>
Average duration of lone-parent episodes(years)	5.6	7.5	4.4	5.5
% of lone-parent episodes ended	56.5	47.3	83.4	63.8
% of ended lone-parent episodes ended by marriage	77.4	59.3	97.4	83.7

Source: Statistics Canada, Family History Survey, 1984.

Table 1.8

## Lone-parent families, by province, 1991

	Lone-parent families			Lone-parent families as % of all families with children		
	Female head	Male head	Total	Female head	Male head	Total
	000s			%		
Newfoundland	14.5	3.4	17.9	12.9	3.0	15.9
P.E.I.	3.6	0.7	4.4	15.4	3.1	18.5
Nova Scotia	27.7	5.4	33.1	17.1	3.3	20.4
New Brunswick	22.0	4.6	26.5	16.3	3.4	19.7
Quebec	220.1	48.8	268.9	17.7	3.9	21.7
Ontario	283.8	59.0	342.8	16.0	3.3	19.3
Manitoba	30.9	6.4	37.4	16.8	3.5	20.4
Saskatchewan	24.9	5.3	30.2	15.3	3.3	18.5
Alberta	68.3	14.7	83.0	15.6	3.4	19.0
British Columbia	88.2	19.1	107.4	16.7	3.6	20.3
<b>Canada<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>786.4</b>	<b>168.2</b>	<b>954.7</b>	<b>16.4</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>20.0</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes the Yukon and Northwest Territories.

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 93-312.



Table 1.9

## Lone parents among Aboriginal people and visible minorities, 1986

	Lone parents				Female lone parents as % of all women aged 15 and over in group	Women as % of all lone parents in group
	Women	Men	Total			
			Number	As % of all lone parents in Canada		
Aboriginal peoples	34,790	6,240	41,030	4.8	14.8	84.8
Visible minorities:						
Chinese	7,355	1,875	9,230	1.1	4.8	79.7
Blacks	24,960	2,920	27,880	3.3	17.8	89.5
Indo-Pakistanis	5,190	1,445	6,635	0.8	5.0	78.2
West Asians/Arabs	3,185	825	4,010	0.4	6.4	79.4
Filipinos	2,415	395	2,810	0.3	5.6	85.9
Southeast Asians	2,410	730	3,140	0.4	8.6	76.8
Latin Americans	2,565	395	2,960	0.3	10.7	86.7
Japanese	790	180	970	0.1	3.8	81.4
Koreans	455	125	580	0.1	4.2	78.4
Total visible minorities <sup>1</sup>	50,775	9,120	59,895	7.0	8.6	84.8
Other Canadians	616,250	136,120	752,370	88.2	6.6	81.9
Total Canadians	701,815	151,480	853,295	100.0	7.0	82.2

<sup>1</sup> Includes Pacific Islanders and people reporting ethnic roots in more than one visible minority group.

Source: Statistics Canada, Profile of Visible Minorities and Aboriginal Peoples, Employment Equity Program.



# LONE PARENTS IN THE WORKPLACE

## Less likely to be employed

Female lone parents are considerably less likely than other parents to be employed.<sup>6</sup> In 1991, just 52% of these women with children less than age 16 worked outside the home, compared with 65% of women in two-parent families, 71% of male lone parents, and 87% of dual-parent fathers (Table 2.1).

As well, the proportion of female lone parents currently with jobs (52%) is actually about two percentage points lower than it was in 1981, when 54% of these women were employed (Chart 2.1). This decline can be traced largely to substantial drops in employment levels among female lone parents during the recessions in both 1981-1983 and the early 1990s. While there were increases in their employment levels in other years, they were not large enough to offset the declines in these two periods.

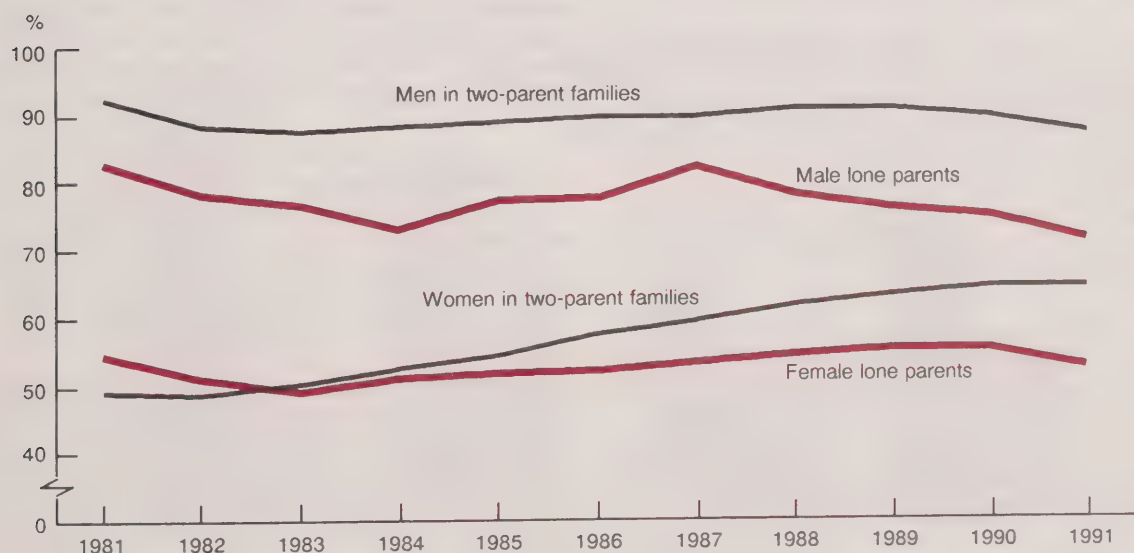
In contrast, employment among women in dual-parent families with children continued to grow over the last decade, even during the economic downturns. As a result, 65% of these women were employed in 1991, up from 49% ten years earlier.

## Decline in male lone parent employment

The employment level of male lone parents has fallen even more dramatically than that of their female counterparts. The share of these men with jobs declined 12 percentage points between 1981 and 1991, from 83% to 71%. As with their female

<sup>6</sup> In this section, families with children include lone-parent families and two-parent families (including both married and common-law couples) with never-married children under age 16 living at home. In 1991, there were 444,000 such lone-parent families with female heads and 65,000 headed by men.

**Chart 2.1** Percentage of parents employed<sup>1</sup>, 1981-1991



<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than age 16 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogues 71-001, 71-220 and 71-529; and The Labour Force Survey.



counterparts, most of this drop occurred during the recessions. The proportion of husbands in two-parent families with jobs also fell in the 1981-1991 period, from 92% to 87%.

## High unemployment, low labour force participation

The relatively low employment level of female lone parents is a reflection of the fact that many of these women are either unemployed or not in the labour force at all.

Unemployment rates are very high among lone parents. In 1991, 16.8% of women heading lone-parent families were unemployed, well over the rate (9.6%) for women in two-parent families with children (Table 2.3). That year, an average of 47,000 female lone parents were unemployed each month.

Unemployment, though, is also high among male lone parents, 15.7% of whom were unemployed in 1991. This was over twice the rate for husbands in two-parent families (7.7%).

In addition, a very high proportion of female lone parents are not currently in the labour force. In 1991, 166,000 of these women, 37% of the total, were neither employed nor actively seeking work (Table 2.6). This compared with 29% of women in two-parent families with children, 15% of male lone parents, and 5% of husbands in dual-parent units.

## Personal/family responsibilities a factor

There are a variety of reasons why female lone parents are either unemployed or not in the labour force. The largest share of unemployed female lone parents, 48% in 1991, had either lost their last job or been laid-off (Table 2.4). However, this proportion was considerably below those for both women in two-parent families (58%) and fathers, whether they headed one-parent families (76%) or were partners in two-parent families (83%).

At the same time, 14% of unemployed female lone parents reported they had left their last job because of personal or family responsibilities. While this figure was about the same as that for unemployed wives in two-parent families, it was well above those for both male lone parents (7%) and husbands in two-parent families with children (1%).

Similarly, a relatively large proportion of female lone parents are not in the labour force because of personal or family responsibilities. In 1991, 21% of

these women reported they had left their last job for these reasons (Table 2.6).

However, the largest share of female lone parents not in the labour force had not worked outside their homes in the last five years (27%). Another 19% had either lost their job or been laid off within the previous 5 years, while 12% had never been employed.

## Work experience and young children

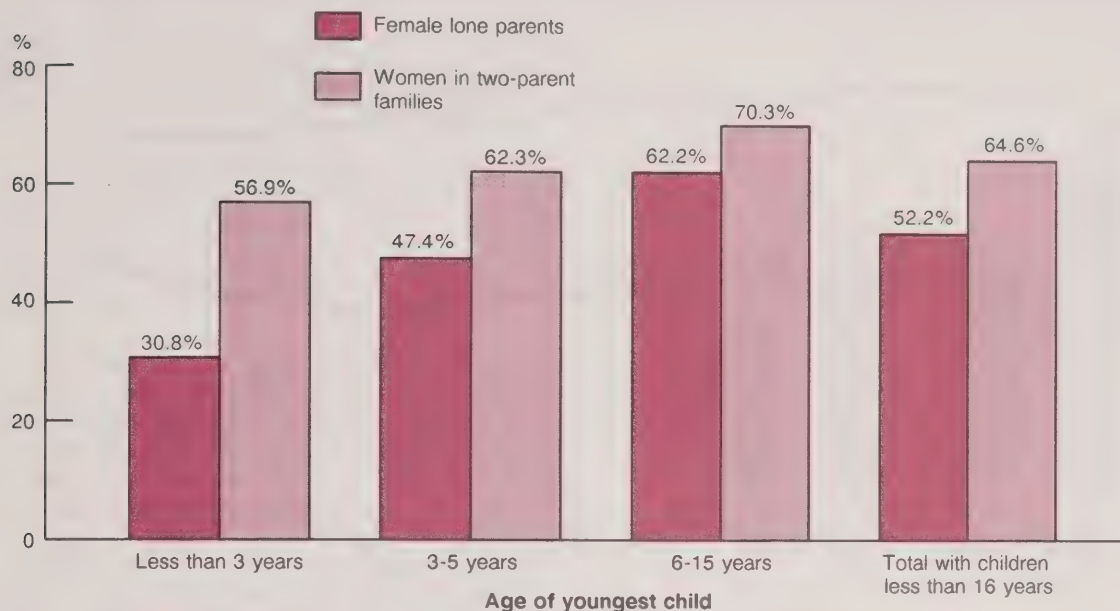
As with other women with children, the labour force activity of female lone parents is affected by the presence of young children. For example, in 1991, just 31% of these women with children less than age 3 and 47% of those whose youngest child was aged 3-5 worked outside the home (Chart 2.2). This compared with 62% of those whose youngest child was aged 6-15.

There is a particularly wide gap between the employment levels of female lone parents with very young children and comparable women in two-parent families. In fact, in 1991, the level of employment of female lone parents with children less than 3 years (31%) was only about half that for comparable women in two-parent families (57%).

Unemployment is also very high among female lone parents with young children. In 1991, 25.5% these women with children less than age 3 and 20.4% of those whose youngest child was aged 3-5 were unemployed (Chart 2.3). In comparison, the rate among female lone parents with youngest child between 6-15 years was 13.8%, while unemployment levels among women in two-parent situations ranged from 8.7% for those with school-age children to 10.9% for those with children under 3 years of age.

As well, a relatively large percentage of female lone parents with young children are not in the labour force. In 1991, 59% of these women with children less than age 3 and 41% of those with children aged 3-5 were not considered labour force participants (Table 2.2). Both figures were well over those for comparable women in two-parent families.

Not surprisingly, relatively large shares of female lone parents with young children report they are either unemployed or not in the labour force because of personal or family responsibilities. For example, in 1991, 23% of unemployed female lone parents with pre-school-age children (Table 2.5) and 30% of those not in the labour force reported they had left their last job for these reasons (Table 2.7).

**Chart 2.2** Percentage of women with children employed<sup>1</sup>, by age of youngest child, 1991

<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than age 16 living at home.

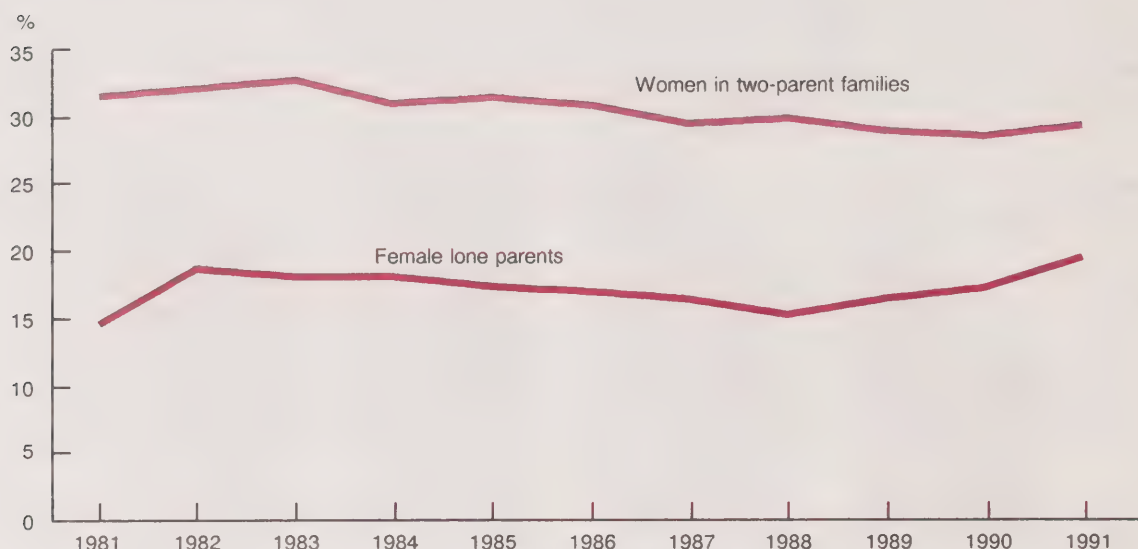
Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 71-220.

**Chart 2.3** Unemployment rates of women with children<sup>1</sup>, by age of youngest child, 1991

<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than age 16 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 71-220.

**Chart 2.4** Percentage of women with children<sup>1</sup> employed part-time, 1981-1991



<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than age 16 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogues 71-001, 71-220 and 71-529.

## Part-time work

Female lone parents are less likely than other women with children to work part-time. In 1991, only 19% of employed female lone parents, compared with 29% of other mothers, had part-time jobs (Table 2.8). The percentage of female lone parents working part-time, though, has increased since 1981, when just 14% of these women had part-time jobs (Chart 2.4). In contrast, the current figure for wives in two-parent families has fallen from a high of 33% in 1983.

As well, part-time work is more common among female lone parents with pre-school-age children than among those with older children. In 1991, 26% of employed female lone parents with at least one child under age 6 had part-time jobs, compared with 17% of those whose youngest child was aged 6-15 (Table 2.9).

On the other hand, few men, regardless of their marital status, are employed part-time. In 1991, only 3% of male lone parents and just 2% of husbands in dual-parent families had part-time jobs.

## More want full-time work

Female lone parents employed part-time are more likely than women in two-parent families with children to want full-time jobs. In 1991, 50% of female lone parents working part-time did so because they could not find full-time jobs (Table 2.8). This was twice the figure (25%) for comparable women in two-parent families with children.

By contrast, women in two-parent families with children were more likely than female lone parents to work part-time because they did not want full-time employment (44% compared with 22%) or because of personal or family responsibilities (29% compared with 20%).

## Occupational Distribution

As with women in general, female lone parents are concentrated in occupations in which women have traditionally worked. In 1991, 71% of employed female lone parents, about the same figure as that for wives in two-parent families (69%), worked in



## Lower levels of educational attainment

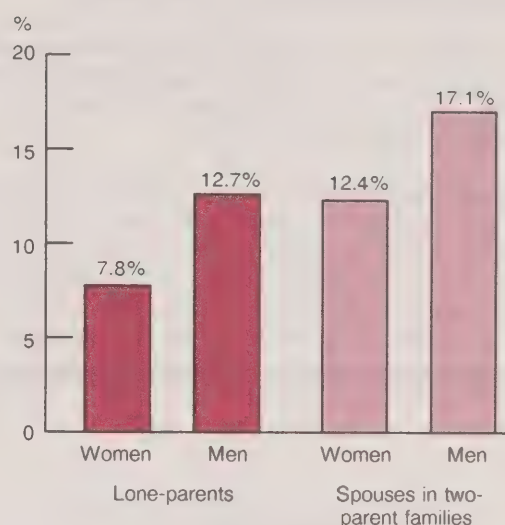
Lone parents generally have lower levels of formal educational training than comparable spouses in two-parent families, a factor which may partially explain some of the differences in the labour force characteristics of these groups.

In 1991, 8% of female lone parents had a university degree, compared with 12% of wives in two-parent families (Chart 2.5). Male lone parents were also less likely than fathers in two-parent families to have a university degree – 13% compared with 17%.

Lone parents are also less likely than other parents to have completed high school. In 1991, 36% of female and 31% of male lone parents had not graduated from high school (Table 2.12). This compared with around 25% of both wives and husbands in two-parent families.

Lone parents are also more likely than other parents not to have gone to high school at all. In 1991, 9% of women and 10% of men parenting alone had not gone beyond Grade 8. In comparison, the figures were 6% for women and 8% for men in husband-wife families with children.

**Chart 2.5** Percentage of parents<sup>1</sup> with a university degree, 1991



<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than age 16 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, The Labour Force Survey.

teaching, nursing, clerical, sales, or service occupations (Table 2.10). In contrast, only 24% of both male lone parents and husbands in two-parent families were employed in one of these occupational groups.

At the same time, though, female lone parents are relatively well-represented in managerial and administrative occupations: in 1991, 13% were employed in these occupations. This compared with 11% for women in two-parent families with children, 14% for male lone parents, and 17% for dual-parent husbands.

On the other hand, very few female lone parents – just 7% in 1991 – worked in traditionally male-dominated areas such as manufacturing, construction, transportation, or the primary sector.

## Time lost from work

Like other women with children, female lone parents generally lose more time from work than do men with children. During an average week in 1991, around

9% of both female lone parents and women in two-parent families with children were absent from work either because they were ill or because of personal or family responsibilities (Table 2.11). The comparable figures were only 6% for male lone parents and 5% for husbands in two-parent families.

Mothers with young children are particularly likely to miss time from work because of illness or personal and family responsibilities.<sup>7</sup> In 1991, 11% of female lone parents with at least one child less than age 6 and 14% of comparable mothers in two-parent families missed time from work for one of these reasons. Both figures were above those for men with children; in fact, the presence of young children had almost no effect on the absentee rate of husbands in two-parent families.

<sup>7</sup> Note that the figures for women in general, and especially for those with young children, are somewhat inflated by the inclusion of those on maternity leave.

## Child care

The availability and accessibility of adequate child care continues to be a vital concern to women with children, especially lone parents.

In 1990, 44% of female lone parents with children under age 14 regularly used some form of child care (Table 2.13). This compared with 31% of two-parent families with children.

Female lone parents are also more likely than two-parent families to use child care facilities outside the home, while they are less likely to use in-home care. In 1990, 82% of female lone parents regularly receiving care used services outside their homes, while 33% had in-home care\*.

In comparison, 75% of two-parent families employed care outside their home, while 38% received in-home care.

Among those receiving child care outside the home, female lone parents are generally more likely than two-parent families to use a day care centre, but not as likely to use less formal arrangements such as sitters, neighbours, or relatives. At the same time, sitters or nannies are the most common form of child care reported by both female lone parents and other families with children using in-home child care on a regular basis.

*\* Totals exceed 100% because respondents could report using more than one type of care.*

## Time allocation patterns

For most people with children\*, whether they are employed or not, the real work day includes a wide range of child care and other domestic work activities.

For example, in 1986, female lone parents with jobs outside the home spent an average of 3.4 hours per day on primary child care and other domestic activities (Table 2.14). Those that reported their main activity as keeping house devoted almost 6 hours per day to these activities.

These figures, though, were actually about an hour a day less than totals for comparable women in two-parent families. However, this difference is at least partially due to the fact that female lone parents generally have both fewer children and smaller households to look after than women in two-parent families with children.

As well, mothers continue to devote more time to domestic activities than men with children, regardless of their marital and/or employment status. In fact, employed male lone parents devoted the least amount of time of any of these groups to primary child care and other domestic work.

On the other hand, female lone parents spend relatively large amounts of time on media and other free-time activities. In 1986, employed female lone parents averaged a little over four hours per day on these activities, while those whose main work activity was keeping house averaged over six hours per day. Both figures were higher than those reported by comparable women in two-parent families. Among those with jobs, though, male lone parents had by far the greatest amount of free time, almost six hours per day.

*\* Includes those with never-married children less than age 25 living at home.*

Table 2.1

Percentage of parents employed<sup>1</sup>, 1981-1991

	Lone parents		Spouses in two-parent families with children	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
	%			
1981	54.2	82.7	48.9	92.1
1982	50.8	78.0	48.5	88.2
1983	48.7	76.5	49.9	87.5
1984	50.7	73.2	52.1	88.1
1985	51.7	77.3	54.3	89.1
1986	51.8	77.8	57.4	89.9
1987	53.0	82.4	59.3	90.0
1988	54.1	78.1	61.6	91.1
1989	55.1	76.1	63.5	90.9
1990	55.1	75.0	64.3	90.0
1991	52.2	71.3	64.6	87.4

<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than age 16 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogues 71-001, 71-220 and 71-529; and the Labour Force Survey.

Table 2.2

Labour force characteristics of women with children<sup>1</sup>, by age of youngest child, 1991

	Youngest child less than 3	Youngest child 3-5	Youngest child 6-15	Total with children less than 16
%				
% employed				
Lone parents	30.8	47.4	62.2	52.2
Women in two-parent families	56.9	62.3	70.3	64.6
Unemployment rate				
Lone parents	25.5	20.4	13.8	16.8
Women in two-parent families	10.9	10.4	8.7	9.6
% not in the labour force				
Lone parents	58.6	40.7	28.0	37.4
Women in two-parent families	36.1	30.1	23.1	28.5
% employed part-time <sup>2</sup>				
Lone parents	25.8	23.3	16.4	19.4
Women in two-parent families	32.4	32.0	26.4	29.1

<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than age 16 living at home.<sup>2</sup> Expressed as a percentage of total employed.

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 71-220.



Table 2.3

Unemployment rates among parents<sup>1</sup>, 1981-1991

	Lone parents		Spouses in two-parent families with children	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
	%			
1981	11.9	7.5	8.8	4.2
1982	16.6	12.9	10.9	7.6
1983	18.8	12.2	11.7	8.2
1984	18.1	15.5	11.8	7.6
1985	18.4	11.7	11.1	6.9
1986	18.4	11.2	9.9	6.2
1987	17.2	8.8	9.6	5.9
1988	14.7	10.8	8.9	4.7
1989	14.3	11.5	8.3	4.8
1990	15.2	12.6	8.4	5.5
1991	16.8	15.7	9.6	7.7

<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than age 16 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogues 71-001, 71-220 and 71-529; and the Labour Force Survey.

Table 2.4

Unemployed parents<sup>1</sup>, by reason for leaving last job, 1991

	Lone parents		Spouses in two-parent families with children	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
	%			
Personal/family responsibilities	13.7	6.6	13.4	1.2
Own illness/disability	6.7	3.4	4.3	2.7
Going to school	2.0	1.7	0.8	0.8
Lost job or laid off	47.7	76.4	57.9	82.8
Other reasons	17.6	6.6	16.2	11.3
Not worked in last 5 years	10.8	5.4	5.9	0.9
Never worked	1.5	—	1.4	0.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total unemployed</b>	<b>46,760</b>	<b>8,656</b>	<b>185,985</b>	<b>197,364</b>
% unemployed	16.8	15.7	9.6	7.7

<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than age 16 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

Table 2.5

Unemployed women with children<sup>1</sup>, by reason for leaving last job, by age of youngest child, 1991

	Female lone parents			Women in two-parent families with children		
	Youngest child less than 6	Youngest child 6-15	Total with children less than 16	Youngest child less than 6	Youngest child 6-15	Total with children less than 16
	%					
Personal/family responsibilities	22.6	6.0	13.7	22.4	3.9	13.4
Own illness/disability	5.4	7.7	6.7	3.7	5.0	4.3
Going to school	1.9	2.1	2.0	1.0	0.7	0.8
Lost job or laid off	45.3	49.8	47.7	51.0	65.2	57.9
Other reasons	14.8	20.0	17.6	15.4	16.9	16.2
Not worked in last 5 years	8.3	13.0	10.8	4.5	7.4	5.9
Never worked	1.8	1.3	1.5	1.9	0.9	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total unemployed</b>	<b>21,524</b>	<b>25,236</b>	<b>46,760</b>	<b>95,407</b>	<b>90,578</b>	<b>185,985</b>
% unemployed	22.6	13.8	16.8	10.7	8.7	9.6

<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than age 16 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

Table 2.6

Parents not in the labour force<sup>1</sup>, by reason for leaving last job, 1991

	Lone parents		Spouses in two-parent families with children	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
	%			
Personal/family responsibilities	20.7	10.7	23.4	2.2
Own illness/disability	6.2	13.8	4.4	16.9
Going to school	5.4	5.1	1.4	7.1
Lost job or laid off	19.2	28.8	17.6	43.8
Other reasons	9.6	9.8	9.4	12.9
Not worked in last 5 years	27.1	31.6	34.4	15.7
Never worked	11.8	0.2	9.3	1.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total not in labour force</b>	<b>165,855</b>	<b>9,956</b>	<b>775,307</b>	<b>141,663</b>
% not in labour force	37.3	15.3	28.5	5.3

<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than age 16 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

Table 2.7

Women not in the labour force with children<sup>1</sup>, by reason for leaving last job, by age of youngest child, 1991

	Female lone parents			Women in two-parent families with children		
	Youngest child less than 6	Youngest child 6-15	Total with children less than 16	Youngest child less than 6	Youngest child 6-15	Total with children less than 16
	%					
Personal/family responsibilities	30.4	7.8	20.7	35.3	6.1	23.4
Own illness/disability	4.8	8.0	6.2	3.4	5.7	4.4
Going to school	5.1	5.7	5.4	1.5	1.2	1.4
Lost job or laid off	19.2	19.0	19.2	15.9	19.9	17.6
Other reasons	10.4	8.5	9.6	9.0	10.1	9.4
Not worked in last 5 years	18.3	38.9	27.1	26.7	45.8	34.4
Never worked	11.7	12.1	11.8	8.0	11.1	9.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total not in labour force</b>	<b>95,106</b>	<b>70,749</b>	<b>165,855</b>	<b>461,206</b>	<b>314,101</b>	<b>775,307</b>
% not in labour force	49.9	27.9	37.3	34.0	23.1	28.5

<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than age 16 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

Table 2.8

Parents employed part-time<sup>1</sup>, by reason, 1991

	Lone parents		Spouses in two-parent families with children	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
	%			
Personal/family responsibilities	20.0	8.7	29.1	4.2
Own illness/disability	1.3	1.7	0.6	4.7
Going to school	6.1	1.7	1.0	8.8
Did not want full-time work	22.4	21.2	44.2	11.2
Could only find part-time work	49.6	65.9	24.7	68.0
Other reasons	0.6	0.7	0.4	3.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total employed part-time</b>	<b>45,008</b>	<b>1,616</b>	<b>510,227</b>	<b>40,201</b>
% employed part-time	19.4	3.4	29.1	1.7

<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than age 16 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.



Table 2.9

Reason women with children work part-time<sup>1</sup>, by age of youngest child, 1991

	Female lone parents			Women in two-parent families with children		
	Youngest child less than 6	Youngest child 6-15	Total with children less than 16	Youngest child less than 6	Youngest child 6-15	Total with children less than 16
	%					
Personal/family responsibilities	27.4	14.7	20.0	37.5	20.4	29.1
Own illness/disability	0.6	1.9	1.3	0.4	0.8	0.6
Going to school	9.4	3.8	6.1	0.9	1.1	1.0
Did not want full-time work	21.1	23.3	22.4	42.1	46.4	44.2
Could only find part-time work	40.9	55.9	49.6	18.8	30.7	24.7
Other reasons	0.6	0.4	0.6	0.3	0.4	0.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total employed part-time</b>	<b>18,852</b>	<b>26,156</b>	<b>45,008</b>	<b>256,998</b>	<b>253,229</b>	<b>510,227</b>
% employed part-time	25.5	16.6	19.4	32.2	26.5	29.1

<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than age 16 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

Table 2.10

Occupational distribution of parents<sup>1</sup>, 1991

	Women		Men	
	Lone parents	Spouses in two-parent families	Lone parents	Spouses in two-parent families
	%			
Managerial/professional				
Managerial/administrative	12.9	11.0	13.6	17.0
Teaching	5.9	8.0	4.1	3.4
Nursing	9.8	8.4	0.4	0.6
Other health professions	2.3	3.4	2.7	1.6
Other professions	6.9	5.4	11.3	9.9
Total managerial/professional	37.7	36.4	32.1	32.4
Clerical	28.3	29.9	5.4	4.4
Sales	8.4	8.1	5.5	8.4
Service	18.2	14.6	8.7	7.3
Primary	0.6	2.8	6.1	6.7
Processing/machining	4.4	5.6	20.7	19.6
Construction	0.3	0.3	13.1	10.8
Transportation	0.7	0.8	4.4	6.4
Materials handling	1.3	1.4	3.8	4.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total employed (000s)</b>	<b>231.9</b>	<b>1,755.1</b>	<b>46.3</b>	<b>2,352.1</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than age 16 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

Table 2.11

Percentage of parents losing time from work<sup>1</sup>, by reason, by age of youngest child, 1991

	Lost time because of own illness or disability	Lost time because of personal/family responsibility	Total
	%		
Female lone parents with children			
Less than 6 years	5.6	5.9	11.4
6-15 years	5.7	2.2	7.9
Total	5.7	3.4	9.0
Women in two-parent families with children			
Less than 6 years	3.6	10.9	14.4
6-15 years	3.5	1.7	5.2
Total	3.6	5.9	9.4
Male lone parents with children			
Less than 6 years	4.5	3.6	8.1
6-15 years	3.8	1.9	5.7
Total	3.9	2.3	6.2
Men in two-parent families with children			
Less than 6 years	3.1	1.8	4.8
6-15 years	3.3	1.1	4.4
Total	3.2	1.4	4.6

<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than age 16 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

Table 2.12

Educational attainment of parents<sup>1</sup>, 1991

	Lone parents		Spouses in two-parent families with children	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
	%			
University degree	7.8	12.7	12.4	17.1
Post-secondary certificate or diploma	23.9	28.5	27.7	29.1
Some post-secondary	10.4	6.4	8.5	7.8
High school diploma	22.3	21.4	28.3	20.7
Some high school	27.0	20.6	17.3	17.5
Less than grade 9	8.5	10.3	5.8	7.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total (000s)</b>	<b>444</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>2,716</b>	<b>2,691</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than age 16 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey.

Table 2.13

Child care arrangements<sup>1</sup>, 1990

	Female lone parents	Two-parent families with children
Number with children less than 15 (000s)	415.0	5,222.8
Number receiving regular care <sup>2</sup> (000s)	181.5	1,607.3
% receiving regular care <sup>2</sup>	43.7	30.8
% of those receiving regular care <sup>2</sup> :		
outside the home	81.5	74.9
in the home	32.8	38.2
% of those receiving care outside the home <sup>2</sup> :		
regular day care centre	47.9	40.1
workplace day care	9.1	12.7
sitter/neighbour	47.3	60.5
grandparent	16.6	25.9
other relative	15.8	19.4
other	6.2	12.2
% of those receiving in-home care <sup>2</sup> :		
sitter/nanny	65.1	67.9
grandparent	16.7	28.2
other relative	19.7	26.8
other	15.3	8.5

<sup>1</sup> Column totals may exceed 100% because respondents could report more than one type of care.<sup>2</sup> Includes care other than that provided by own parents.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1990.

Table 2.14

Time spent on selected activities<sup>1</sup>, 1986

	Productive Activities					Personal care	Media and other free time
	Primary child care <sup>2</sup>	Domestic work including shopping	Total domestic work	Paid work	Total productive activity <sup>3</sup>		
hours per day <sup>4</sup>							
<b>Employed</b>							
Female lone parents	0.6	2.8	3.4	6.1	9.6	10.2	4.2
Women in two-parent families with children	0.8	3.5	4.3	5.4	9.9	10.5	3.6
Male lone parents	0.3	1.8	2.1	6.3	8.8	9.5	5.7
Men in two-parent families with children	0.5	1.7	2.2	7.3	9.5	10.1	4.3
<b>Keeping house</b>							
Female lone-parents	1.2	4.7	5.9	0.4	6.6	11.0	6.4
Women in two-parent families with children	1.7	5.2	6.9	0.5	7.6	11.2	5.2

<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than age 25 living at home.<sup>2</sup> Includes only primary child care activities such as diapering, reading to children, etc. Other activities such as eating meals with children or watching children while doing something else are not included. See Table 4.4 for total time spent interacting with children.<sup>3</sup> Includes time spent on education activities.<sup>4</sup> Figures averaged over a seven-day week.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1986.





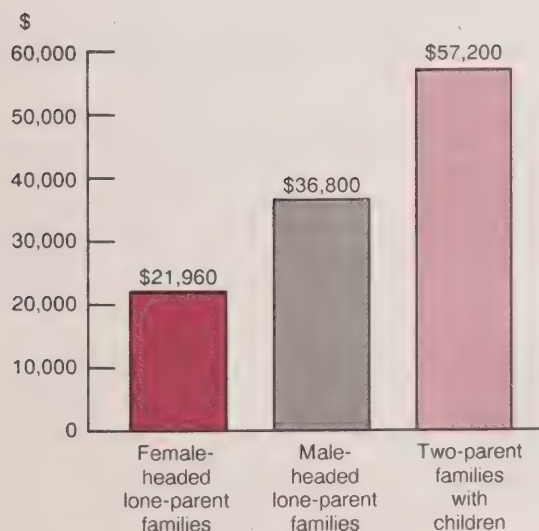
# INCOME

## Limited incomes

Lone-parent families<sup>8</sup>, especially those headed by women, have very low incomes. In 1990, female-headed lone-parent families had an average income of just \$22,000 (Chart 3.1). This was only 38% of the average income of husband-wife families with children (\$57,200) and 62% that of lone-parent families headed by men (\$36,800).

As well, there was little improvement in the real income of female-headed lone-parent families during the 1980s. In fact, the average income of these families was actually 2.5%, about \$600, lower in 1990 than in 1980, once changes in the cost-of-living are accounted for (Table 3.1). In contrast, the real income of two-parent families with children rose an average of 6.3%, or about \$3,400, in the same period.

**Chart 3.1** Average family income<sup>1</sup>, 1990

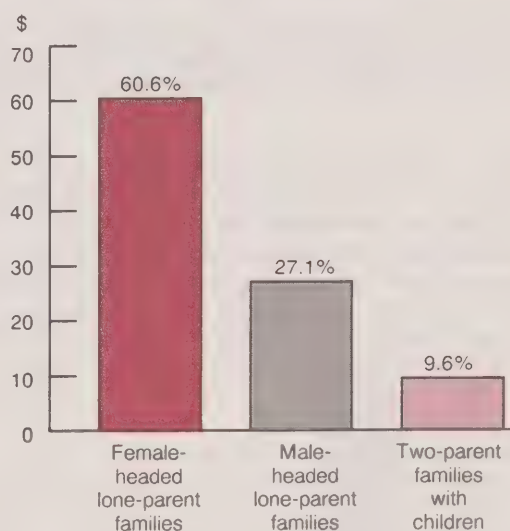


<sup>1</sup> Includes families in which the head is under age 65, with children less than age 18 living at home.  
Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 13-207; and The Survey of Consumer Finances.

## Majority with low incomes

The proportion of lone-parent families headed by women with incomes below Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-offs is one of the highest of any group in the country. In 1990, 61% of these families were classified as having low incomes (Chart 3.2). This compared with just 10% of two-parent families with children.

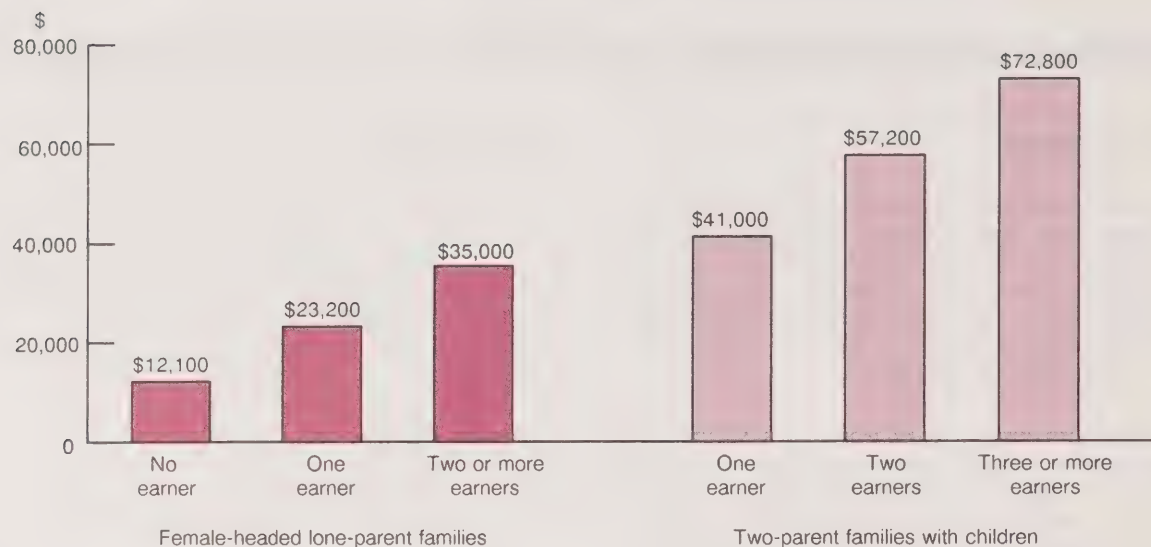
**Chart 3.2** Percentage of families with low income<sup>1</sup>, 1990



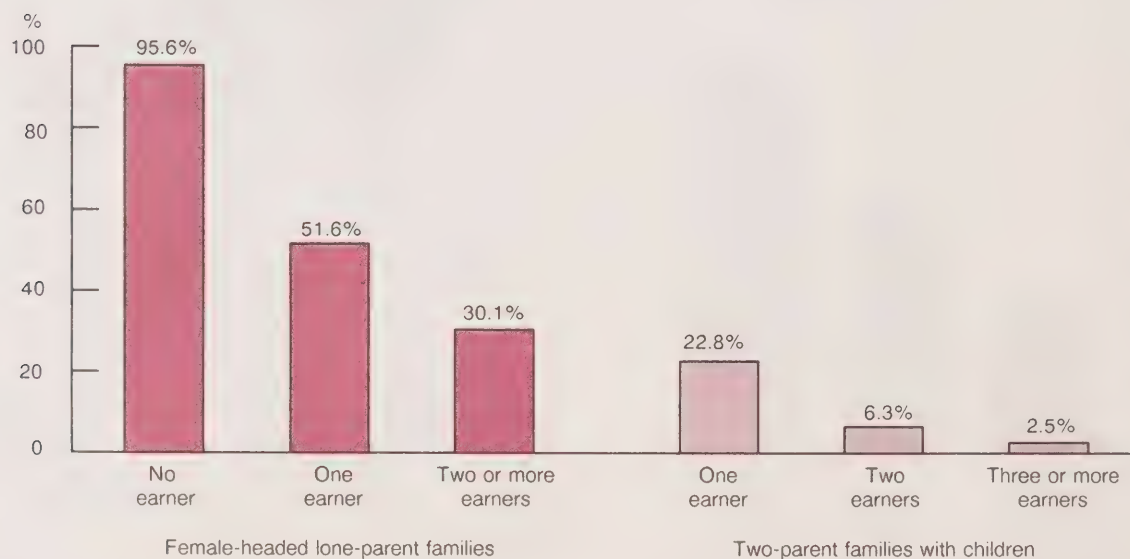
<sup>1</sup> Includes families in which the head is under age 65, with children less than age 18 living at home.  
Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 13-207; and The Survey of Consumer Finances.

That year, over a quarter of a million (257,000) female-headed lone-parent families had low incomes. Together, these families, which represented only 12% of all non-elderly families with children less than age 18, made up 47% of these families with low incomes.

<sup>8</sup> In this section, families include lone-parent families and two-parent families (including both married and common-law couples) in which the head is under age 65 with at least one child less than age 18 living at home. In 1990, there were 421,000 such lone-parent families headed by a woman and 68,000 with a male head.

**Chart 3.3** Average family income, by number of earners<sup>1</sup>, 1990

<sup>1</sup> Includes families in which the head is under age 65, with children less than age 18 living at home.  
 Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 13-207; and The Survey of Consumer Finances.

**Chart 3.4** Percentage of families with low income, by number of earners<sup>1</sup>, 1990

<sup>1</sup> Includes families in which the head is under age 65, with children less than age 18 living at home.  
 Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 13-207; and The Survey of Consumer Finances.



Again, there was little change in the low income situation of female-headed lone-parent families during the 1980s. Indeed, the percentage of these families classified as having low incomes in 1990 was actually three percentage points higher than in 1980 (Table 3.2).

A relatively large proportion (27%) of lone-parent families headed by men also had incomes below the Low Income Cut-offs, however, this figure was still well below that for female-headed lone-parent families.

### Fewer earners, less income

The income picture is especially bleak for female lone-parent families with no earner. These families, which represent about a quarter of all female-headed lone-parent families, had an average income of just over \$12,000 in 1990 (Chart 3.3). As a result, almost all of these families (96%) were classified as having low incomes (Chart 3.4).

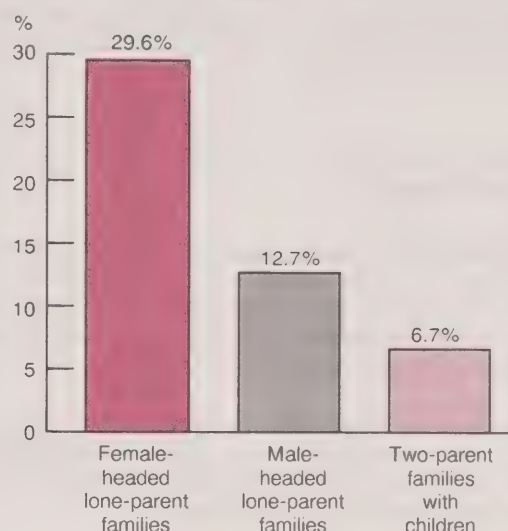
At the same time, the majority of female-headed lone-parent families with one earner also had low incomes. In 1990, 52% of these families had incomes below the Low Income Cut-offs. The incidence of low income among female-headed lone-parent families with more than one earner, at 30% in 1990, was considerably lower; even so, this figure remained well above those for two-parent families with children.

### Dependence on transfer payments

A relatively large share of the income of lone-parent families with female heads comes in the form of transfer payments<sup>9</sup>. On average, transfer payments made up 30% of the income of these families, compared with 13% for lone-parent families headed by men and just 7% for two-parent families with children (Chart 3.5).

Transfer payments make up an even greater share of the income of female-headed lone-parent families at the lower end of the income scale. In fact, 69% of all income received by these families with incomes below \$10,000 and 66% of that for families with incomes between \$10,000 and \$20,000 came in the form of transfer payments<sup>10</sup>.

**Chart 3.5** Percentage of family income from transfer payments<sup>1</sup>, 1990



<sup>1</sup> Includes families in which the head is under age 65, with children less than age 18 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, *The Survey of Consumer Finances*.

### Less earned or investment income

In 1990, wages and salaries and income from self-employment produced just 62% of the income of lone-parent families headed by women (Table 3.3). This compared with 89% for two-parent families with children and 85% for male-headed lone-parent families.

At the same time, 2.7% of the income of female-headed lone-parent families, about \$600 per year per family, came from investments. While this proportion was about the same as that for two-parent families with children (3.1%), the actual dollars earned from investments were only about a third those of dual-parent families.

### Income from other sources

Female-headed lone-parent families are more dependent on income from other sources, including alimony or child support, than other families. In

<sup>9</sup> Includes all social welfare payments such as family allowances, unemployment insurance, public pensions, social assistance, and refundable tax credits.

<sup>10</sup> Source: Statistics Canada, *Survey of Consumer Finances*.

1990, 5% of the income of lone-parent families headed by women, compared with only about 1% of that for both male-headed lone-parent families and two-parent families with children, was classified as other money income. Overall, these other money income sources provided female-headed lone-parent families with an average of about \$1,200 per year per family.

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## Spousal support

The issue of spousal and child support, or the lack thereof, is one of the major public policy concerns related to lone-parent families headed by women. Indeed, it appears that only about one in five such families receive support of this kind.

Figures from the 1990 General Social Survey indicated, for example, that just 19% of lone-parent families headed by women received financial support from anyone outside their household.

In another study, based on 1988 tax data, 21% of all lone-parent families and 31% of those with children under 18 reported on their tax returns that

they had received either spousal or child support payments.<sup>11</sup>

These payments, though, made up an important component of the income of those families receiving them. In 1988, recipient families received an average of \$4,500 in alimony; this represented 19% of their total income.

Unfortunately, the tax data disclose only support payments actually paid and reported to Revenue Canada and not those that should be paid. It has been estimated, for example, that there are currently 90,000 unpaid support orders in Ontario alone, totalling almost half a billion dollars in delinquent payments.<sup>12</sup>

However, some efforts are being made at the provincial level to ensure support payments are made. For example, as of March 1, 1992, employers in Ontario are obligated to withhold alimony payments from the wages of delinquent employees.

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<sup>11</sup> See "Alimony and Child Support", by Diane Galarneau, in *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, Statistics Canada, Catalogue 75-001, Summer 1992.

<sup>12</sup> "Payroll Deductions for Family Support to Start Next Spring", *Canadian HR Reporter*, Vol. 4, No. 38.

Table 3.1

Average family income<sup>1</sup>, 1980-1990

	Lone-parent families with female head	Two-parent families with children	Income of lone-parent families with female head as % of that of two-parent families with children
	Constant 1990 \$		%
1980	22,527	53,815	41.9
1986	21,085	54,408	38.8
1987	21,687	55,691	38.9
1988	21,717	56,543	38.4
1989	23,687	58,361	40.6
1990	21,961	57,202	38.4

<sup>1</sup> Includes families in which the head is less than age 65 with children less than age 18 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 13-207.

Table 3.2

Percentage of families with low income<sup>1</sup>, 1980-1990

	Lone-parent families with female head	Two-parent families with children
	%	
1980	57.7	9.4
1986	58.8	10.8
1987	59.0	10.1
1988	56.7	8.9
1989	52.9	8.5
1990	60.6	9.6

<sup>1</sup> Includes families in which the head is less than age 65 with children less than age 18 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 13-207; and Survey of Consumer Finances.



Table 3.3

Composition of family income<sup>1</sup>, 1990

	Lone-parent Families		Two-parent families with children
	Female head	Male head	
		%	
Wages and salaries	60.8	77.4	82.9
Income from self-employment	1.5	7.9	6.3
Investment income	2.7	0.7	3.1
Transfer payments	29.6	12.7	6.7
Other money income	5.4	1.4	1.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Total \$</b>	<b>21,961</b>	<b>36,724</b>	<b>57,202</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes families in which the head is less than age 65 with children less than age 18 living at home.

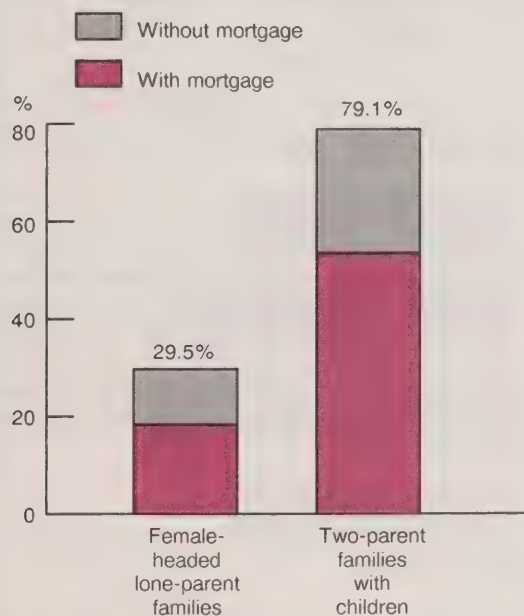
Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Consumer Finances.

# HOUSING AND HOUSEHOLD AMENITIES

## Fewer home owners

Lone-parent families headed by women are much less likely than other families to own their own homes<sup>13</sup>. In 1991, just 30% of female-headed lone-parent families owned their home, well under the figure for two-parent families with children (Chart 4.1). In contrast, 71% of these lone-parent families were renters, compared with 21% of dual-parent families with children (Table 4.1).

**Chart 4.1** Home ownership rates<sup>1</sup>, 1991



<sup>1</sup> Includes households with children less than age 18.

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 13-218; and the Household Facilities and Equipment Survey.

In addition, just 11% of female-headed lone-parent families, less than half the figure for two-parent families with children (26%), owned a home without a mortgage in 1991.

## Older, less crowded homes

Lone-parent families headed by women are also more likely than other families with children to live in older homes. In 1991, 60% of female-headed lone-parent families, compared with 45% of husband-wife families with children, lived in homes that were built before 1971.

On the other hand, the homes of lone-parent families tend to be somewhat less crowded than those of two-parent families with children. In 1991, there were an average of almost 2 rooms per person in lone-parent households headed by women, compared with 1.7 in two-parent family homes.

## Shelter costs

In 1990, shelter costs consumed 20% of all expenditures by female-headed lone-parent families living in one of 17 major metropolitan areas; this compared with 16% for two-parent families with children (Table 4.2).

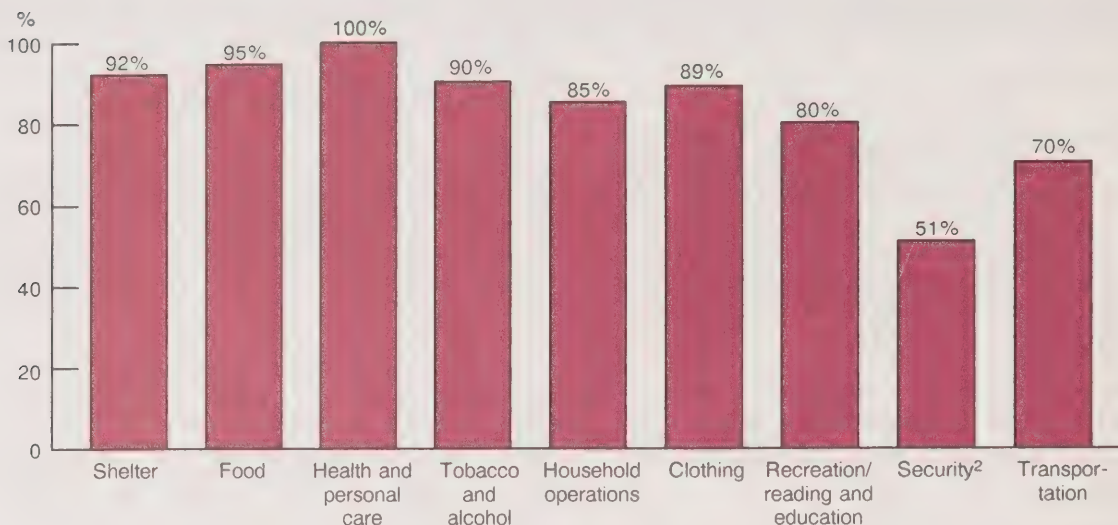
In terms of actual dollars, female-headed lone-parent families spent almost \$4,000 per year less on shelter than did two-parent families with children, however, when family size is considered, lone-parent families headed by women actually spent almost as much per person (\$2,400) on shelter as comparative two-parent families with children (\$2,600).

## Less spending on other items

Lone-parent families spend less than two-parent families with children on most other major spending categories, both in terms of actual dollars and dollars per person. In 1990, per person expenditures by lone-parent families headed by women averaged

<sup>13</sup> The sections on housing and household amenities include families with children less than age 18 living at home. The sections on shelter costs and other expenditures include families with never-married children of any age living at home.

**Chart 4.2** Expenditure per person on selected items by lone-parent families headed by women as a percentage of that of two-parent families with children<sup>1</sup>, 1990



<sup>1</sup> Data are for 17 Census Metropolitan Areas.

<sup>2</sup> Includes life insurance premiums, pension contributions and unemployment insurance payments.

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 62-555.

95% those of comparative two-parent families on food, 89% for clothing, 85% for household furnishings and operation, 80% for recreation, reading, and education, and 70% for transportation (Chart 4.2).

Lone-parent families headed by women also spent only 51% per person what two-parent families with children did on security items such as life insurance, pensions, and other savings and investments.

In 1990, just 30% of lone-parent families headed by women, compared with 57% of two-parent families with children, paid life insurance premiums<sup>14</sup>. At the same time, while 72% of female lone-parents made some kind of retirement or pension fund payment, this was the case for almost all (97%) two-parent families with children. As well, the actual dollars invested in these programs by female lone-parents were only about one third the total for two-parent families with children.

<sup>14</sup> Source: Statistics Canada, Survey of Family Expenditure.

At the same time, though, lone-parent families headed by women pay much less income tax than two-parent families with children. In 1990, female-headed lone-parent families paid an average of \$3,700, 13% of their total expenditures, on personal taxes. In contrast, two-parent families with children paid an average of almost \$15,000, 24% of their total expenditures, in taxes.

### Fewer amenities

Not surprisingly, given the low levels of expenditure by lone-parent families headed by women, they also generally have fewer household amenities than other families. For example, the proportions of lone-parent families headed by women with a washing machine (73%), clothes dryer (67%), microwave oven (69%), freezer (44%), or dishwasher (29%) in 1991 were 15-30 percentage points below those for two-parent households with children (Table 4.3).



## Social contacts/social isolation

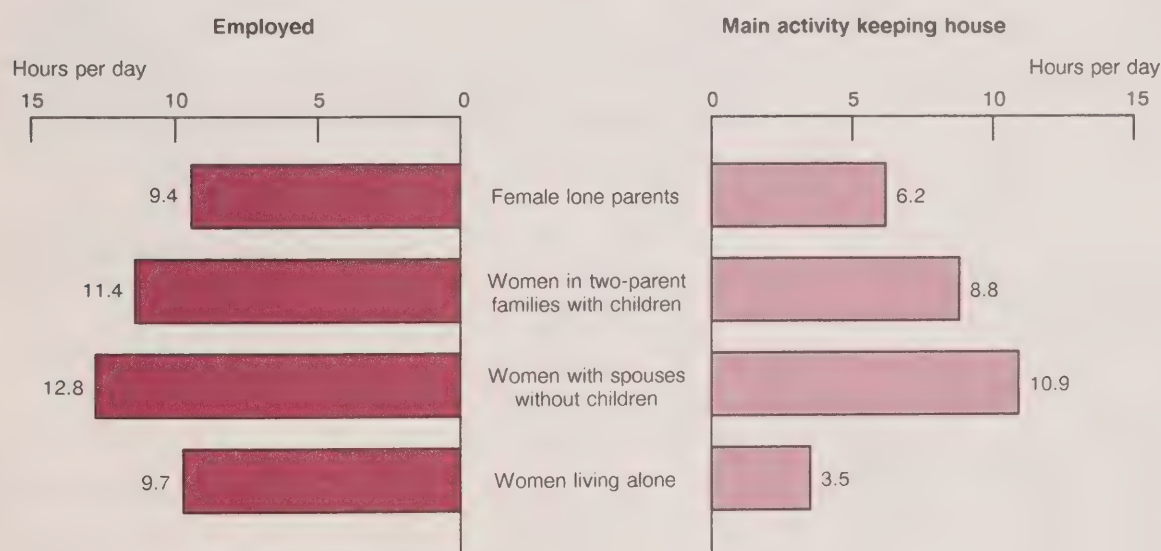
In addition to experiencing considerable material deprivation, female lone parents, especially those whose main activity is keeping house, must deal with a certain degree of social isolation.

In 1986, female lone parents who were not employed outside the home spent a total of only about six hours per day in social contact with people such as friends, co-workers, or family members other than their children (Chart 4.3). This figure was several hours per day below those for most other groups of women. While these female lone parents did spend relatively large amounts of time with their children – about six

hours per day on average – they also spent a lot of time alone (Table 4.4). In 1986, female lone parents who kept house averaged just over five hours per day by themselves, excluding time spent alone on personal care activities such as sleeping.

Employed female lone parents spent about three hours more a day in social interaction with people other than their children than female lone parents who worked at home. The amount of time these women spent in contact with others, however, was still generally below that of women with spouses, especially those who were employed. Female lone parents with jobs outside the home also spent about four hours per day alone. This was slightly greater than the figure for comparable women in two-parent families.

**Chart 4.3** Time women spent with social contacts<sup>1</sup>, 1986



<sup>1</sup> Other than with own children.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1986.

Lone-parent families headed by women were also less likely than two-parent families to have safety devices such as smoke detectors (83% versus 93%) and portable fire extinguishers (30% versus 56%). They were also less likely than other families with children to have equipment such as video cassette recorders (69% versus 87%); air conditioners (15% versus 28%); and home computers (13% versus 29%).

At the same time, though, almost all female-headed lone-parent households had such basic household equipment as bath/shower facilities (99.5%), flush toilets (99.2%), refrigerator (99.1%), telephone (95.8%), and colour television (96.6%).

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## Fewer with vehicles

Owning an automobile can be of particular importance to parents today, whether to enhance employment opportunities, facilitate child care, or balance the two activities. While the majority of lone-

parent households headed by women own an automobile or other vehicle, they are much less likely to do so than two-parent families with children. In 1991, 59% of female-headed lone-parent families had at least one vehicle, in comparison to almost all (95%) two-parent families with children.

**Table 4.1**  
**Housing characteristics<sup>1</sup>, 1991**

	Lone-parent families with female head	Two-parent families with children
	%	
<b>Tenure:</b>		
Owned		
With mortgage	18.4	53.4
Without mortgage	11.1	25.7
Total owned	29.5	79.1
Rented	70.5	20.9
Total	100.0	100.0
<b>Period of construction:</b>		
Before 1941	19.8	13.9
1941-1960	21.0	15.5
1961-1970	19.4	15.1
1971-1980	26.8	30.4
1981 and after	13.0	25.0
Total	100.0	100.0
<b>Rooms per person</b>	<b>1.95</b>	<b>1.69</b>
<b>Total households (000s)</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>3,026</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes households with children less than age 18 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 13-218; and Household Facilities and Equipment Survey.

**Table 4.2**  
**Distribution of family expenditures<sup>1</sup>, 1990**

	Lone-parent families with female head			Two-parent families with children		
	\$	\$ per person	%	\$	\$ per person	%
Food	5,013	1,981	16.8	7,902	2,085	12.8
Shelter	6,066	2,398	20.3	9,917	2,617	16.0
Household furnishings and operation	2,538	1,003	8.5	4,487	1,184	7.2
Clothing	2,085	824	7.0	3,520	929	5.7
Transportation	3,444	1,361	11.5	7,329	1,934	11.8
Health and personal care	1,472	582	4.9	2,200	580	3.6
Recreation, reading and education	2,197	868	7.4	4,098	1,081	6.6
Tobacco and alcohol	924	365	3.1	1,541	407	2.5
Security <sup>2</sup>	1,038	410	3.5	3,062	808	4.9
Other	1,322	523	4.5	3,129	826	5.0
Taxes	3,725	1,472	12.5	14,775	3,898	23.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>29,824</b>	<b>11,788</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>61,958</b>	<b>16,348</b>	<b>100.0</b>

<sup>1</sup> Data are for 17 Census Metropolitan Areas.

<sup>2</sup> Includes life insurance premiums, pension contributions, and unemployment insurance payments.

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 62-555.



Table 4.3

Percentage of households<sup>1</sup> with selected amenities, 1991

	Lone-parent families with female head	Two-parent families with children
	%	
Bath facilities	99.5	99.8
Flush toilets	99.2	99.7
Refrigerator	99.1	99.8
Washing machine	72.9	92.0
Clothes dryer	66.7	90.3
Dishwasher	29.2	59.1
Freezer	43.8	75.0
Microwave oven	69.0	86.3
Air conditioner	14.5	27.9
Smoke detector	82.6	92.6
Portable fire extinguisher	29.6	56.1
Colour television	96.6	98.6
Telephone	95.8	99.1
Video cassette recorder	68.7	86.8
Home computer	13.0	29.2
Automobile or other vehicle	58.7	94.7
<b>Total households (000s)</b>	<b>384</b>	<b>3,026</b>

<sup>1</sup> Includes those with children less than 18 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, Catalogue 13-218; and Household Facilities and Equipment Survey.

Table 4.4

## Time spent with social contacts, 1986

	Hours per day <sup>1</sup>				
	With people other than children of house- hold <sup>2</sup>	With children of house- hold <sup>2</sup>	Total with social contacts <sup>2</sup>	Alone	Personal care
<b>Female lone parents<sup>3</sup></b>					
Employed	9.4	3.4	10.6	3.9	8.9
Keeping house	6.2	6.0	9.6	5.1	9.0
<b>Women with spouses</b>					
Employed					
With children <sup>3</sup>	11.4	4.1	11.2	3.6	8.8
No children	12.8	0.5	10.9	3.5	9.1
Keeping house					
With children <sup>3</sup>	8.8	6.3	10.3	4.3	9.1
No children	10.9	0.7	9.0	5.1	9.5
<b>Women living alone</b>					
Employed	9.7	0.2	8.6	6.0	9.1
Keeping house	3.5	0.3	3.3	10.4	9.8

<sup>1</sup> Figures averaged over a seven-day week.<sup>2</sup> Time spent with both children and others is double counted.<sup>3</sup> Includes those with children less than age 25 living at home.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 1986.

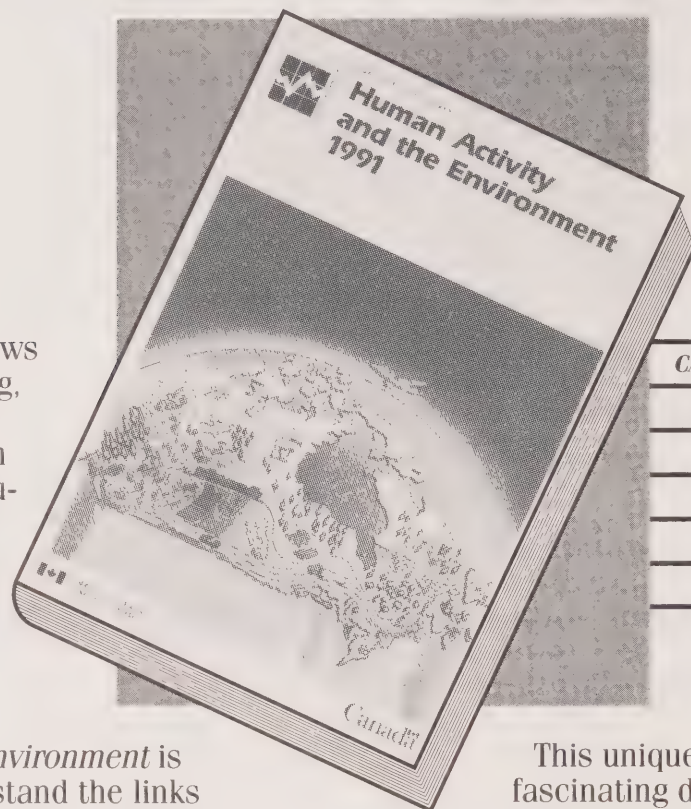
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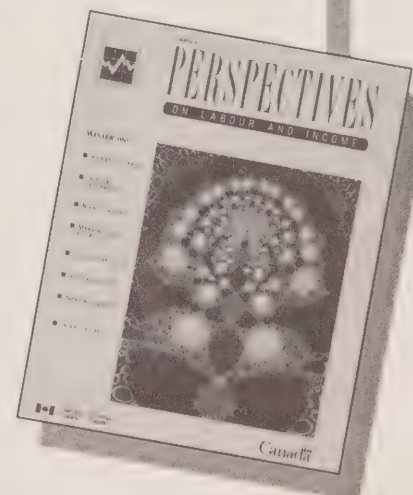
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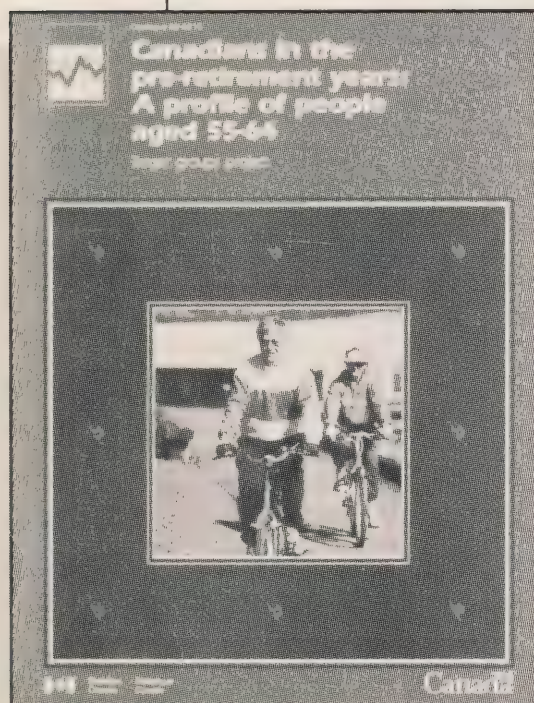
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